

Lake Winnebago 2007 Spring Refill Conference Call Minutes

1. **Introduction.** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Detroit District conducted its annual Spring Refill conference call on 3 April 2007. The call began at approximately 9:30 a.m. CDT with Mr. Travis Dahl, chief of the Watershed Hydrology Branch, introducing the USACE Detroit District personnel and taking a roll call of the participating outside callers. Over 60 interested parties participated
2. **Presentation of the Agenda/Guidelines.** Mr. Dahl offered a brief overview of the Lake Winnebago regulation objectives, primarily to inform new participants in the call. He stated why the USACE regulates Lake Winnebago and the regulation plans for the coming year. He reported that the level of Lake Winnebago at the time of the call was about 2.08 ft. on the Oshkosh datum and that the USACE's current model runs showed that the level of Lake Winnebago could be between 2.2 ft. and 2.3 ft. by 8 April. This rise in lake level is in line with the regulation objectives for this time of the spring. However, he noted, as we approach the 2.5 ft. level, the opening of additional Neenah needle gates may be needed to meet our objectives. Nearly 7,200 cfs of water was entering the lake at Oshkosh and about 9,200 cfs was being released at Appleton with six tainter gates at the Menasha Dam and five tainter gates and three needle gates at the Neenah Dam open.

Ms. Marie Strum, Assistant Chief of the Engineering & Technical Services Division, explained that flood control is the primary purpose of regulating Lake Winnebago since we no longer have any navigation interests. The USACE winter drawdown provides flood storage for the spring snow-melt, and a slow-controlled spring refill should bring the level of Lake Winnebago to the summer target of 3.0 ft. in accordance with our regulation objectives. She further emphasized that during the spring fill-up, a faster wet-to-dry transition may occur which would prompt the USACE to fine-tune the current plan-of action to meet the seasonal objectives.

3. **Refill Plan** Ms. Strum outlined the spring fill-up. She stated that the current plan-of-action is to bring the lake level up to between 2.4 ft. and 2.7 ft. by 1 May and to 2.7 ft.-3.0 ft. by 1 June. The USACE plans to target the lower end of the 0.3 ft. operating band that was built into the plan to accommodate any significant storm events that could cause the lake to rise above the target and cause flooding along the lake shorelines.

Last year Lake Winnebago reached about 3.0 ft. by 1 June. The USACE will closely monitor water level conditions. Should the basin approach dry conditions as it did in the last 2 years, the USACE will keep a step ahead and make appropriate adjustments to meet our objectives. Ms. Strum stated that if we experience a quick wet-dry transition, the USACE may fill the lake to the 3.0 ft.

target earlier. This is the primary reason for having an operating band that provides flexibility.

4. **Basin Conditions.** Mr. Keith Kompoltowicz, from the Watershed Hydrology Branch, provided an update of the past winter's snow pack. He stated that a few times this winter there was 4 to 6 inches of snow on the ground with 1 to 2 inches of snow-water-equivalent (SWE). At the end of February there was a large storm event dropping up to 14 inches of snow on the basin which equated to a SWE of about 6 inches. The SWE was at a maximum on about 4 March. Between 6 March and 15 March there was a steady melting of snow and all snow was off the ground by 16 March.

Mr. Kompoltowicz also stated that there are signs of a severe drought in western Lake Superior Basin but it is forecasted to improve by June. Normal precipitation conditions are expected for April and through the remaining spring months.

Mr. Brian Hahn of the National Weather Service informed the group about recorded frost depths this winter. Frost was recorded up to 5 feet deep in northern Wisconsin, however, there was only a minimal amount left in the extreme northern portions of the basin. Mr. Hahn also stated that the Wolf River was expected to continue to rise for a few days but it was not expected to reach flood stage.

5. **Snow Conditions.**

Mr. Art Techlow from the Wisconsin DNR summarized this winter's ice conditions. He reported that ice formed in December and then broke up early. It then reformed in mid-January and reached a maximum thickness of about 22 inches. Lake Winnebago experienced ice-out on 29 March.

6. **Open Discussion**

Mr. Bob Stanick, chief of the Fox River Sub-Office (FRSO), stated that his office continues to coordinate with power users along the Lower Fox River as the down-river pools are adjusted to accommodate outflow conditions.

Mr. Bruce Gomm of Kaukauna Utilities stated that they were pleased with the FRSO coordination and support from that office. He also indicated that Kaukauna Utilities was satisfied with the existing high flow conditions along the Lower Fox River.

Mr. Rob Elliott of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) responded to a sturgeon spawning question. He stated that the annual sturgeon spawn occurs in late April through the first two weeks of May. The opportune window is mid-April -1 June. He also commented that filling Lake Winnebago earlier is

acceptable and the current high flows are not an issue. He stated that low flows after spawning while the eggs are incubating could cause problems. Flows less than 4,000 cfs in mid-May, depending when the spawn occurs, will be a problem for the development of the eggs.

Mr. Dahl stated that the USACE will coordinate with the paper companies in DePere and the USFWS in an effort to accommodate the spawning concern.

Skip Palermo from the Appleton Yacht Club mentioned that the Menasha Lock is scheduled to open on 11 May. He also reported that the Fox River Navigation Authority will have the grand opening of the Appleton Lock on 19 May.

Brian Tungae from the City of Menasha, in conjunction with Winnebago County, stated that Radtke Contractors will be conducting buoy placement in the Menasha Channel on or about 27 April.

A concern was expressed regarding shallow spots in the Winneconne area. A suggestion offered was to raise pool elevation to alleviate the problem. Other alternatives, including redefining the navigation channel and dredging, were offered. Mr. Techlow suggested that relocating the navigation buoys to mark deeper waters in the upriver lakes may be the solution. The USACE was requested to consider dredging this location. However, it was noted that the USACE only dredges authorized Federal channels and with current funding issues, the USACE dredging programs are limited.

Property owners in the Point Comfort area on the west shore of Lake Winnebago just south of Oshkosh, were concerned about low water levels during the spring for the last three years. Mr. Techlow stated that the spring fill-up process has been conducted in the same manner for over 25 years and that the lake should rise about another eleven inches by 1 July. He suggested being patient for the fill-up.

Ms. Judy Johnson of the TriCounty Powerboat Alliance in Freemont provided their contact information: www.tcp@centurytel.net or (920)446-3930 for future reference.

Concerns were voiced regarding whether the scale and the gage readings on Lake Winnebago have been off for the last couple of years. The USACE stated that all of the lake gages were recently resurveyed and are correct.

Mr. Tom Davis of Winnebago County emphasized the enormity of the drainage area susceptible to flooding and that Lake Winnebago acts like a huge retention pond that contains early storm runoff.

Mr. Dahl thanked all participants and adjourned the conference call at 10:30 a.m. CDT.